

Check dates of coins for silver content

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions from Tribune readers.

Q—Our safe-deposit box is filled with coins taken from pocket change in the 1970s. How can we tell which ones have silver? We want to cash them in.

H.I., Chicago Heights

A—Check the dates. You'd own .72 of an ounce of silver for each dollar's worth of dimes, quarters or half-dollars issued in 1964 or before.

Other U.S. coins containing silver include most nickels made between 1942 and 1945 (.056 ounce per piece), half-dollars dated 1965 to 1970 (.15 ounce each) and dollars minted before 1936 (.77 ounce each).

Don't be fooled by Eisenhower dollars produced for circulation during the 1970s or Susan B. Anthony dollars dated 1979 through 1981. They contain nickel and copper but no silver.

Q—I'm thinking of investing in "wheat cents." A local coin shop is charging \$65 for 2,500 coins, guaranteed unsearched. Is that price competitive?

J.K., Wilmette

A—Probably. Dealers advertising in a recent issue of Coin World are asking from \$62.50 to \$67.50 for 2,500 wheat cents (Lincoln pennies made between 1909 and 1958). A bag of 5,000 coins costs from \$101 to \$112.50, judging from the Coin World ads.

Q—I've noticed that dollar bills have tiny letters and numbers in the upper left and lower right corners (in addition to the serial numbers). For example, the notations on a bill I have read "D2" and "D153." What do they mean?

R.B., Evanston

A—Currency is printed on large sheets, 32 notes to the sheet. "D2" refers to the spot your bill occupied within the sheet (which was the eighth—or last—position in the first of four columns) and "153" identifies the printing plate used to create your bill.

You'll also find a small plate reference number on the back, just below the "E" in the large word "ONE."